

Silicon Valley NUI Goes Back to the Future

Allan Hurst

One stormy night in September 1994, five people attended the first meeting of the South Bay NetWare Users Group. Considering the meeting was not advertised, five people wasn't a bad turnout.

Attendees approached the meeting with different expectations, ranging from guarded optimism to jubilation. However, all of the attendees expressed a desire to meet with their peers to get technical support and advice on a monthly basis. Attendees also wanted to talk directly to manufacturers and software publishers, including Novell. To fulfill this wish list, the South Bay NetWare Users Group established its primary mission, "to improve communication and understanding between Novell, its industry partners, and Novell Users International (NUI) members."

The second South Bay NetWare Users Group meeting drew 15 people. By then, the group had worked with other regional NUI presidents to coordinate a meeting schedule that wouldn't conflict with any other local NUI groups. During the next couple of months, membership continued to grow: Approximately 25 people attended the third meeting, and 40 people attended the fourth meeting.

By the end of 1995, the South Bay NetWare Users Group had more than 180 members, making it the largest user group in the region. Although group membership declined during the next few years, today membership is again on the rise.

In February 1997, the group changed its name to *Silicon Valley NUI (SVNUI)*. This new name emphasizes the group's geographic location, cultural identity, and its ties to Novell and NUI.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

SVNUI was one of the first NetWare user groups to use e-mail to contact its

members. Using e-mail to contact members not only saves time, money, and paper but is also more convenient than snail mail. SVNUI officers use e-mail messages to announce meetings and to follow up meetings with information, such as speaker contact information or technical advice.



Early in the group's history, members gave "home-grown" presentations on topics ranging from backup and restoration issues to proactive network management. The discussions that followed these presentations grew into one of the group's most popular and enduring meeting segments, User Round Table. During this segment, members present technical problems and ask other members for help.

Prospective speakers receive three PDF files: one file explains SVNUI's history, one file explains specific speaker guidelines, and one file is a membership application. These documents help speakers understand the profile of group members and what these members expect when they attend an SVNUI meeting. (You can download copies of these PDF files at SVNUI's web site [<http://www.nui.net/svnui>].)

SVNUI requires presentations to be technical, rather than based on a specific product. For example, instead of talking about Fast Ethernet network interface cards (NICs), a presenter dis-

cusses Fast Ethernet technology. The presenter is then allowed 15 minutes at the end of the presentation to talk about how a specific product applies to the technology discussed. Based on the feedback SVNUI receives, members like the technical presentations.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

At the first meeting, group officers discovered a powerful incentive for encouraging members to attend meetings: provide free food. At each meeting, SVNUI provides a buffet dinner. The dinner is usually paid for out of the vendor speaker fee.

Perhaps it's the nature of Silicon Valley culture, but meetings are informal and fun. Early in SVNUI's history, group officers decided that providing dinner and a fun meeting was the best way to attract members, and they've never regretted that decision!

A TIME AND A PLACE

SVNUI moved to Novell's new Silicon Valley campus in early 1999, and now meets in a multimedia-equipped presentation room. A connection to Novell's TCP/IP backbone is available for demonstrations and connections to Novell's web site and the Internet.

SVNUI puts its unique location to good use. For example, at the February 2000 meeting, Novell's Dave Eckert previewed his BrainShare presentation, "Windows 2000 vs. NetWare 5" to more than 130 people, including a dozen Novell employees.

If you ever find yourself in the San Jose area on the second Thursday evening of the month, please stop by—SVNUI members would love to meet you! For more information about SVNUI, visit the NUI web site (<http://www.nui.net/svnui>).

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